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*with the author*

THE

*Compliment*

# ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON,

AT THEIR

SIXTY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY MEETING,  
MARCH 8, 1837.

BY

EDWARD HEADLAND,

ONE OF THE HONORARY SECRETARIES OF THE SOCIETY, ETC., ETC.

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## ORATION.

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,

It appears from the records of the Medical Society of London, that its founders were of opinion that the objects for which it was instituted would be promoted, and medical science benefitted, by the delivery of an Annual Address by one of its members, upon some subject connected with medicine, and this course has been now adopted during the last 64 years. That there is no profession which requires more extensive attainments than ours appears sufficiently manifest from the diversity of subjects selected by those I have the honor to succeed, each having afforded an abundance of matter for long and important reflection ; so that, were it not for the almost boundless extent of knowledge to be gained, there would in this good old age of our Society, be scarcely a path which has been yet unexplored. But so mysterious are the laws of nature, and so difficult of comprehension are those deviations which constitute disease, as well also as the application of remedies to those

diseases when well ascertained, that there will doubtless yet be, for many years to come, abundant opportunities for doubt and explanation.

The present period is however so important in a political point of view, as it respects the Medical Practitioners of Great Britain, that I feel constrained to deviate in a slight degree from the usual custom, and to direct your attention, upon the present occasion, to what appears to me to be one of the legitimate objects of this Society, viz. to consider some of those circumstances which affect the dignity, honor, and prosperity of the medical practitioner. As a justification of this course, I beg to remind the Fellows of this Society, that the very principle of its foundation as enacted in its first laws, is, that the Society do consist of physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries—thereby giving a guarantee, that at least within the walls of Bolt Court, no distinction can be obtained by mere academical rank ; and therefore, in addressing men whose names are so associated, I feel assured that they are all willing to consider with patience and respect, that which may concern the happiness and prosperity of any portion of the medical community.

The present division of the profession into grades, and the subdivisions in the separate Colleges or Corporations, you are all so familiar with, that it would be a matter of unnecessary detail to describe them ; I would only remind you, that there is scarcely one of *you* whom I have now the pleasure to address who is not by their bye laws excluded from the



honors and emoluments of the College or Corporation to which he may be attached. Now, I would ask, would not any person unacquainted with the fact, conclude that there must be an essential difference in the education and consequent competency of the several practitioners in medicine, according to their academical rank? would they not be surprised at being told that so far as medical education is concerned, there is *no* essential difference between the Fellow of the College of Physicians and the extra Licentiate of that body; or between the President of the College of Surgeons, and the ordinary Member of that body; or between either the physician or the surgeon and the apothecary; but that if strict examination be a test of competency, it is more perfect as regards the lowest of these grades than the highest—nay, that the apothecary is required to give evidence of greater knowledge of the sciences collateral to medicine, than even the physician.

It has been well remarked, that it is the business of every good Government to provide the greatest good for the greatest number; and in that spirit originated a measure some twenty-two years since, which was considered by the legislature to be a test of competency to practise medicine\*—yet, after the many toils he has endured to obtain this proof, he who succeeds is contemptuously termed an *apothecary*, from my lord to the shop boy, and deemed subordinate to all other

\* The Apothecaries' Act of 1815.

ranks in his profession—and why? Is it because he has no knowledge of medicine and the sciences that belong thereto—or because he has not the preliminary of a good education? No, for his examination is a proof of the sufficiency of both; but because he belongs to what by custom is considered the lowest grade of his profession. And so it is with the profession itself—each in the ascending scale endeavors to elevate himself upon the supposed inferiority of the one below him, from the Fellow of the College to the Licentiate of the Apothecaries' Company.

Now, if any person will only pass his eye over the whole list of the College of Physicians, he will perceive how insufficient they would be as regards numbers to the medical relief of the British population; for let their services be ever so equally divided, it is of course impossible that 462 persons can be adequate to the relief of the 16 millions and upwards which England and Wales alone contain, being in the ratio of one to every 34,482 persons.\* If, therefore, you admit what long-standing custom seems erroneously to have established, that the competency of persons attached to this body is greater than that of those who are otherwise qualified, it necessarily follows that the great bulk of the community are constantly without the assistance of the highest order of medical knowledge; thereby making it appear, that there is to be one kind

\* In this number of 462, I have included the names of many Physicians who have declined practice, and others who are resident in the colonies or abroad elsewhere.



of medical relief for the rich and another for the poor. Must not this reflect also upon the Government, whose duty it is to provide the greatest good for the greatest number, and render the Act of Parliament to which I have referred apparently useless?

The Company of Apothecaries too, be it remembered, is not the only body which provides medical practitioners unconnected with the College of Physicians, for the London College of Surgeons is constantly pouring forth large numbers of highly endowed individuals, who, superadded to their surgical attainments, are constantly affording us abundant proof of their medical sufficiency. Indeed it would be wrong to pass over them as a body, without reminding this meeting, that there are many distinguished men in their list, who may be said to have added by their researches very much to the improvement of modern medicine. I allude not simply to the physiological and pathological labors of these eminent persons, but to the well-known fact, that in addition to the improvement in mere chirurgy and mechanical aids, so much has been effected by them in the adaptation of medical agents for the removal of diseases which were formerly deemed incurable except by the knife, that the number of operations within the last twenty years has been reduced to at least one half—and thus they have contributed greatly to the relief of suffering humanity.

Facts go beyond all theory, and in this simple circumstance therefore I hesitate not to challenge a

denial that this body eminently deserves a high rank among British medical practitioners.

In short, on a dispassionate and honest consideration by all who are competent to judge, it must be admitted, that all legally qualified medical practitioners of whatever grade, are, as far as their education is concerned, equally entitled to the confidence of the public. A higher degree of intellect, a greater fund of experience, or a more abundant measure of industry in availing themselves of that experience, will constantly raise some men to a just superiority over others—but *these* should be the *only* distinctions—since, I repeat, that as far as education is concerned, all are absolutely equal.

Let me not, in what I have advanced, be supposed to be indifferent to the learning, to the high medical and philosophical acquirements, and gentlemanly deportment of those distinguished men who are ranked in the list of the Royal College of Physicians, and who so admirably support what I will term the aristocracy of physic. The body to which they belong, in an altered form, I believe it to be desirable should still exist ; for it should not be forgotten, that since the foundation of that body, there have been many eventful periods in English history, in which the agitations of the state have suspended the march of medical science, and during which periods, had it not been for this learned body, that science would have lost much of the dignity and honour with which it is at present invested,—and quackery would have shewn



its protean head in even more murderous forms than it has already done.

But it is now my object to contend for the principle, that all classes of the community are entitled to equal medical aid, and that the present laws assume a difference. We must bear in mind that the distinctions in rank in practical medicine must necessarily differ from those in the other learned professions, law and divinity ; the separate members of these professions may possess different degrees of competency without risk or inconvenience to the public—but with *us* it must not be so—there is not a case in which we are required to attend, but that we ought to be ready at the moment with the best and most efficient remedies ; for, if misapplied remedies are not always immediately fatal, they must always add to the sufferings of the afflicted, and not unfrequently thwart the more skilful means of relief which may be subsequently applied.

Let us consider, also, the injury which the bare imagination of a different degree of medical competency is likely to produce. How must it agonize the afflicted parent to think, that had better means been used, the life of a beloved child might have been saved—how must it add to the sufferings of the bereaved husband to believe, that the endeared partner of his life has been removed from the want of the due application of the best powers that art affords—or the delicate and helpless widow, cast upon the mercy of a piti-

less world, without the means of providing for her numerous offspring, how can *she* support the thought, that there were other and better aids, which might yet have spared the heart that loved, and the arm which would have laboured for her ! And yet our present classification really implies all this ; else are we all alike, and there is no real distinction, no difference in the medical education, and consequently in the requisite competency, between the highest and the lowest.

And for the sake of our country, I feel proud to say this is the truth. If it were universally known that such is the advanced state of medical education that the examination for the lowest station, is a test that secures an efficiency of medical acquirements, as completely as the examination for the highest—if this were a fact that was thoroughly known, the comfort of the community must be in no small degree increased.

All else of evil in the present subdivision affects ourselves only. It cannot be denied, but that it is highly desirable that legislative interference, if the course could be well ascertained, should do away with the present distinctions ; but until the end of such a measure can be well foreseen, I feel that it is almost “ better to bear the ills we have, than fly to those we know not of.” It appears to me however, that during the time which must elapse before the fittest means can be resolved upon, it is unwise in the legislature to interfere by the adoption of partial measures, the tendency of which will be



to create still further distinctions. I allude to a Charter, recently granted, incorporating certain persons, for the purpose of granting degrees in physic and surgery. Now, if we put aside the obvious tendency which this has to injure well-established and reputed schools of medicine, still it appears to me, that it may also affect the reputation of the present race of medical men, and may moreover be said to have become law, without the voice of the profession having been heard. So also, I fear, must be viewed another charter, incorporating a Medical Society,\* which tends to establish a presumed greatness, deterring persons from joining more humble, but not less useful institutions of a similar nature. In this course, Government is perpetuating the great fault of sanctioning partial measures ; measures that are not founded upon a thorough knowledge of the whole subject and its difficulties, and calculated merely to benefit particular individuals in connection with certain schools of medicine. These measures, I repeat, appear to me to be premature and ill judged ; still, I think, that many will agree with me in believing, that our present system of medical polity stands in need of a thorough reformation.

Taken as a body, the practitioners in medicine, of all degrees, are admitted by the rest of the community to be of the highest respectability and education ; they are, therefore, unlikely to

\* The Medico-Chirurgical Society, recently incorporated by royal charter.



raise complaints without just reason. But can we, who are in the early exercise of our practical knowledge, who are now sustaining the burden and heat of the day, can *we* endure, without complaint, the certainty of being for the rest of our lives, according to general definition, the same subordinate and inferior men? Can we behold unmoved that so many distinguished and learned individuals, in both Colleges, many of whom are rapidly passing to the decline of life, can we behold them sink into their graves, still marked as something inferior in talent and usefulness, when compared with the heads of their Colleges? Does not this apply to many of the highly-respected individuals who are associated with us; and where, I would ask, should we place their names in the scale of science, of learning, and of medical talent, had we the power to render them what they deserve? Go, I would say to the sceptic upon this subject, bring me the men who are merely graced with high academical honours, ransack your universities, and summon the *élite* of all your colleges, and I should be proud to compare them with many whose names adorn the list of the Medical Society of London—and are they not of the excluded?

What men, I may fairly ask *you* who have so much experience of its truth, what men undergo more toil than medical men, who have to submit to more deprivations, who are denied the world's pleasures more than they?—to them there is no

rest from their labors ; the seventh day, which bestows rest upon all other men, brings little or none to them. It is indeed difficult fully to appreciate the labor and exertion which are required to give the professor of medicine anything like a competent knowledge of his art. Much, indeed, he may acquire from his academical pursuits, but much, also, he must learn by the closest observation. He must be content to spend many years, perhaps the best of his life, in ceaseless endeavors to gain fresh accessions of knowledge ; yet perhaps will have the mortification to find himself still very far short of perfection. But, if he be honest in his search after truth, he will not resign his task, but, in spite of all obstacles, will still press forward. But can we endure to think that such an ardent and zealous student of his profession—and many such, I am well aware, there are among those whom I address—*he* who has spent many a midnight hour in study, and many an anxious day in earnest observation, should yet be condemned to comparative obscurity by the unjust regulations of that profession for which he has sacrificed so much ?

Because all this devolves upon the general practitioner, is he the less entitled to the honours of the profession in his old age ? Are the children of a man who has so labored, to feel that their parent is lower in rank than other men not more deserving ? For it may be safely said, that the greatest probability of the success in a child, is the prospe-



riety and honor of the parent ; and if the child has not this advantage, he loses much in his future career ; thus, on account of our children, we have just ground for complaint.

It will perhaps be said, that I am telling you things which are well known to you all, and for which there is no remedy. I have before expressed an opinion that an immediate legislative enactment would be inexpedient ; and I believe it would be so, because a measure sufficiently comprehensive to meet the whole difficulty would necessarily do an injury to many persons, whose existence depends upon the present system. There would, perhaps it will be thought, be a more easy course, that of rendering every member or licentiate of each college or corporation entitled upon turn or merit to its highest honors ; but in that way you still continue with respect to medicine, the present absurd distinctions. But one of my chief objects in bringing this matter before you now, is to impress upon your attention that the best interests of our profession are to be promoted by the free intercourse of all its members, without reference to academical rank ; all, who have sufficient zeal in the service of humanity to forego distinction, and who feel that it is due to the profession they have adopted, that they should bring forward every fact they can collect which may elucidate its obscurities, and who would be conscious of a dereliction of duty did they deceive the public by professing to be compe-



tent practitioners in medicine, unless they had, at the same time, exerted every faculty in the constant observation of disease. For it is only by such a close observation of disease, superadded to theory, that the student becomes really efficient ; and it is in societies similar to this, that he learns how to properly appreciate such experience. It is in such associations that we learn how to disencumber ourselves of that which is useless, and to select that which is of value ; and it may be fairly said, that he who does not join some institution of this kind not only does not avail himself of abundant means of improvement, but in some measure neglects to give the public the best guarantee he can of his competency, by not constantly submitting his opinions to the scrutiny and revision of his more experienced brethren. In short, I should say, that it is to the extension of institutions like this that we should at present devote ourselves, to uphold the dignity and honor of the medical practitioner : it is by joining such societies that he gives the only proof in his power of his desire to increase his knowledge, and of his fitness to rank among the highest members of his profession. But it is not in its present limited form that it should exist ; it should be increased for all its purposes at least tenfold. An extensive combination of this kind would do more than anything else, at the present moment, to elevate the interests of all, because it would bring into operation the advice and experience of all.

Again, it must be obvious that such societies are eminently useful in softening those unhappy differences and petty jealousies which too often arise among us. It must surely happen that kindness and good feeling will spring up among men who constantly meet together, and who are taught by that association that their occupations and even their habits of thinking, though the latter may be varied by their different constitutions and tempers, are yet in a great measure alike. I do indeed earnestly wish that this, and other excellent institutions of the same nature, could teach us the simple truth that we are all one common brotherhood, so that any public injury, wantonly inflicted upon the character or reputation of a single member, is sure to be felt in a greater or less degree by the whole united body. We are, it must be allowed, very far from having attained to such a happy unanimity of feeling ; but this Society appears to be well adapted to promote so desirable an object.

It has been frequently remarked by those who have preceded me in my present honorable task, but it cannot be too often enforced upon our attention, that the Society upon whose anniversary we meet to day, is admirably calculated to soften our animosities by breaking down all artificial distinctions. It is so constituted, that incapacity and ignorance, whether found in those who are of high or in those who are of low degree,



are sure to find their proper level ; while the genuine talent and the deep research which are admired in the physician or the surgeon, are no less honored when they shine with equal lustre in the general practitioner. What can it avail a man who has to maintain an argument among conflicting opinions—what clearness can it give to his reasoning, or what strength can it add to his position, that he is the Fellow of one College or the Licentiate of another ?—all these adventitious circumstances are evidently of no use in arming him for the intellectual contest. And thus it must often happen that the physician is obliged to respect the knowledge and the talents of one who belongs to that class which perhaps but a short time since he secretly judged to be only qualified to compound the medicines which he himself prescribed—while on the other hand the apothecary, (if I may employ that designation which has almost become a *term of reproach*) is often compelled to acknowledge the truth of that which his jealous surmises may have led him to suspect, that the greatest talent and erudition are frequently found united with rank in the profession. By these means the prejudices on both sides are softened, and it is to be hoped often entirely subdued ; so that if it were for this good office alone, this Society is well deserving of our best regard and support.

But let me revert to an argument which I have before advanced. I maintain, that every British



subject is entitled to equally efficient medical aid ; the British dominions possessing no less than twenty-seven millions of persons, it is perfectly clear that the members of the College of Physicians are not equal to their relief : then, either the Government must be grossly negligent of human life, or the members of the other colleges and halls are equally competent, and the distinction becomes absurd. I should regret that these observations should be thought offensive to any one ; indeed I have so high an opinion of the good sense of the greater number of the body to whom I allude, as to believe that they are willing to lend their aid in changing the present situation of the general practitioner. I do not believe that the *remuneration* of the general practitioner is complained of—it is simply that means are taken by false distinctions to lower him in the estimation of the public—thereby destroying, for the exaltation of others, that confidence in his capability which in the present state of his acquirements he does not deserve. Thereby also, empiricism obtains one of its greatest aids, and patent medicines their tremendous consumption. Indeed I cannot forbear to say, that if we were less desirous of our own exaltation, and more willing to bear testimony to each other's competency, that quackery would feel a greater blow than it has ever yet sustained ; as the prosperity of quacks and their medicines too often arises from the want of unanimity among ourselves.

—While upon this subject I cannot avoid expressing my astonishment, that an enlightened Government should sanction the sale of medicines, the composition of which is unknown, and therefore may be injurious in a high degree to the health of the community; and still more disgraceful is it, that they should receive a premium upon such proceedings. Surely the labours of our profession, and the good conferred by us upon the country, entitle us to an exemption from this insult—for an insult it is, that in the nineteenth century, the leading journals of the day should be filled with puffs of specifics for every ailment, when it is well known that scarcely one specific really exists. It is due, I say, to the medical profession, that a commission be established to enquire into the nature of every secret medicine, and to award, if there be any of value, such compensation as the discoverers might be justly entitled to.

In this way, this disgrace to the present age would no longer exist, and the public would be properly informed of the true value of such compositions; our courts of justice would be no longer occupied in the scandalous way we have frequently witnessed, by being made the medium of advertising the abominable, useless, and filthy nostrums of ignorant and designing men.

In this shameful system of sanctioning the sale of secret medicines, we have constantly presented to us the injustice of a Government requiring a



severe test of qualification from the labouring part of authorized practitioners, while ignorant pretenders are allowed to trifle with the lives of the British people regardless of consequences. It should be remembered, that before a law is made for the regulation of our moral proceedings, or the settlement of the rights of property, the professors of the law are consulted, lest the new law should interfere with the established principles of the British constitution ; if health and life are not of *less* importance than property, surely the medical profession should be consulted upon the merits of a supposed remedy, before an ignorant and reckless person should be allowed to spread over the face of the globe the devastating influence of poisonous nostrums. It will be seen, therefore, that Government, so long as this state of things continues, is not only guilty of a great insult to a large and valuable part of its subjects, but is in fact responsible for the mischief which must daily ensue.

I cannot allude to British courts of justice, without remembering how constantly we are placed in situations of the heaviest responsibility with the public, in the discharge of our serious and multiplied duties with respect to them ; and I am proud to say, that the improvements in what is called forensic medicine reflect the brightest lustre upon modern times. It is a consolation of no ordinary kind, that we now feel that we can venture upon these arduous duties, not only with ease to ourselves, but



with an accuracy that shall make the evidence of numbers coincide in so remarkable a degree, as in criminal matters shall, with unerring accuracy, fix the guilty, and in the hour of their extremity, protect the innocent. There are, nevertheless, matters of a civil nature in which the present state of our science, will enable us to give opinions only, and in which many of us being called, the opinions will necessarily vary ; of course, in these cases it is left to the court and jury to well consider such conflicting opinions, and to judge honestly to the best of their ability. It has often struck me, that in these cases frequent injustice is done to the great bulk of the profession : in every case of importance, persons of all grades in the profession are called, but invariably more of what are deemed the higher than the lower ranks ; thus the Fellows of the College of Physicians are in the greatest number, and Members of the Council of the College of Surgeons the next, while, at the same time, the question is generally one of *practical* experience. Have we not seen these gentlemen upon such occasions placed side by side on the bench with the learned Judges, while the licentiate of the College of Physicians, and the ordinary member of the College of Surgeons, remain in the body of the court,—thereby seeming to denote to the jury that there is something more competent in the former than in the others. Is there not a danger, therefore, that justice may be perverted ; and while the opinion of the

one is likely to be as valuable as that of the other, may not the jury be deceived with respect to this fact, and be misled by supposing their obsolete superiority in this particular still to exist? It may happen, too, that there may be a difference in the circumstances of the plaintiff and defendant, and that the poorer one may be unable to obtain others than the general practitioners to give evidence in their behalf. I do wish that my humble voice could reach the ears of the learned and distinguished judges of our land, that they would manifest their usual impartiality, and cease to sanction a seeming distinction. Thus they would give to evidence its proper weight; and by rendering only what is due to these already injured persons, they would, from their exalted station in society, greatly assist in elevating them in the estimation of the public.

But to return from this digression. It appears to me also, that this Society is so formed as to be well adapted to promote—and perhaps in a much higher degree than it has hitherto done—another object which is highly important to the interests of our profession. I mean the strict investigation of every new system which professes to throw any additional light upon the science of medicine. It is indeed true that from a very early period in the history of our art, quackery, properly so denominated, has always abounded and perhaps it may be a question whether in our day it does not flourish to an unusual degree. Nor can we wonder at this,



when we consider the favorable circumstances to which I have before referred, under which it exists, and when also we continually see how many votaries it is sure to find among the great and the distinguished. It is not my present object to enquire whether that disunion among ourselves, to which I have adverted, may not be instrumental in producing that occasional alienation and want of confidence in the professors of medicine which is the chief support of quackery. I may briefly remark that this disunion, together with our well-known discordance of opinion upon many important subjects, may well produce such an effect,—and thus once more confirm the true maxim, “that a house divided against itself can never stand.” But, I desire to ask, what are the proper and the just means which such a Society as ours should employ to put down quackery under the various forms which it assumes? How ought we to disabuse the public, when we see that they are grossly deluded by some ignorant pretender to medical science? Shall we treat him and his system with derision and contempt, and pass him by as wholly unworthy of our notice—thus leaving him to bring forward all his statements unanswerd and unfuted by us; or shall we strictly examine his doctrine and his practice, so far as we are able to obtain any knowledge of them, and then by our calm and deliberate reasoning, convince the public of the fallacy of that which they have too easily



believed ? Which plan promises the most success ? and which is it, therefore, our highest interest to adopt ?

But if this course should be pursued with regard to those who have manifestly no pretensions to the high claims which they set up to public confidence, who are well known to be ignorant uneducated men, studiously striving to conceal the medicines they prescribe, and the methods they adopt from professional scrutiny—if even towards *them*, both our justice and our interest demand that we should thus act, how much more incumbent is it upon us to examine into any system which professes *no* secrecy, but rather courts our closest investigation. And, if after mature consideration, and a fair trial of the remedies which such a system professes, we find reason to be convinced that its professors are enthusiastic in their belief, at least we shall then have the satisfaction of not judging them foolishly and rashly ; we shall have taken every means in our power to arrive at the truth, and thus manifest to the profession and the public that *base* motives of pecuniary advantage are incapable of blinding us, when the interests of medical science, and the general welfare, are supposed to be at stake. This Society is therefore entitled to our regard, as it affords us an opportunity of canvassing with our medical brethren the merits of every new system of medicine, and of thus proving to the public that we are not idle in our search after truth,

but are willing to pursue it wherever it may be found.

The pursuit of the practical part of the medical profession, must, in a very early stage of the career of every man, force him to consider the fact, that although in every age the sciences collateral to medicine make rapid progress, yet that medicine itself, so far at least as system is concerned, remains as little reduced to fixed principles, so that it may be applied with certainty in its remedial quality, as it did a century ago : and while the Baconian system of teaching by induction may have changed the mode of obtaining knowledge, I submit it as a matter of doubt, whether the world has derived so great a degree of benefit as an ordinary observer would be disposed to think. Every student in medicine, upon turning to his nosological tables, is struck by the apparent simplicity of his duties : he has but to make out the essential characters of the disorder he is about to treat, and, in his belief, the work is done ; it is but to be able to say that this belongs to such a class, and such an order, and the malady is sure to yield to the remedy. But as he moves on through the long path of years, he discovers, day after day, how unable he is to adapt the disorders he has to treat to the simple arrangement of that which he is taught, and his early visions of perfection in his science often gradually fade, and give place to that only which is really valuable, “ the experience



which is founded on constant observation.” I should be sorry to be understood as not joining in the admiration almost universally bestowed upon the systems of nosology we at present possess, because I believe them to be as perfect as the present state of learning can render them, and by reducing the science to certain broad principles, the course which the young practitioner adopts becomes more safe, and he is enabled to observe with more order and consequent advantage—and because also, to throw aside all system in education, would render the acquirement of any practical knowledge more difficult. But if we admit, as I think we must, that observation and experience are the surest means of obtaining that kind of knowledge which is most useful to us, we shall then be enabled to appreciate another advantage which this Society possesses, and which must be more or less valued by all who are accustomed to attend its meetings: I mean the great facility which it affords to every individual member to acquire upon every subject that is discussed, the result of the observation and experience of the whole assembly. To every one of us this must often be of essential service, and to the young and inexperienced practitioner the benefit must be incalculable. It may be truly said, that without having endured the toil, he enjoys the fruit of other men’s labours, and thus obtains without cost that which they have earned through many years



of patient investigation. We have, it is true, many excellent medical works which communicate to us the result of the different writers' experience upon almost every subject ; but without insisting upon the well-known fact, that there are many who will gladly listen, and yet will seldom read, we need only remember, that in any work however deserving of our attention, we can obtain but the opinion of one, while in the Society we may avail ourselves of the knowledge and observations of *many* ; and these, perhaps, more advanced and experienced than ourselves in medical science. There is, also, another reason why this opportunity of forming and correcting our opinions through the medium of others should be especially valuable to us. Every one must be aware of the great difficulty which all medical writers have to contend with in classifying disease, so as to present it to us in precisely the same form with which it comes under our own notice ; that this is a difficulty not easily overcome, is, I think, chiefly attributable to the operation of various causes upon the same disease, so as frequently to alter or to modify its entire aspect. Some of these causes may arise from the variations in the atmosphere, changes in the moral and political world, and many others too numerous for me to notice. But medical men, whose patients reside in the same metropolis, and are therefore liable to be operated on by the same causes, are constantly meeting with the same form and modification of

disease ; it is therefore of great consequence that such men should be able to communicate rapidly with each other, so that by hearing the detail of the cases which have fallen under the notice of others, and the result of the remedies which they have employed, they may be the better enabled to form their judgment upon such as occur in their own practice. These remarks more particularly apply to the numerous epidemics that have prevailed among us for the last few years. This opportunity of communicating rapidly with each other, this Society affords to all its members ; and this is, therefore, another reason why it is deserving of our support.

In conclusion, Gentlemen, I would earnestly enforce upon your attention, that which forms the chief object of my address, viz. that it is the duty of all who love their profession to stand forward at this critical period in defence of the rights and interests of every one of its members. It is not the general practitioner alone, though all classes have too often combined to treat *him* with contempt ; but it is not *he* only who has injuries to redress ; the Licentiate of the College of Physicians, and those who practise surgery purely, have also much reason to complain. For my own part, I am certainly not an advocate for the demolition of the two Colleges, which appear to me to be among those excellent institutions of our country, upon which our ancestors have bestowed much pains, and which therefore possess more intrinsic excellence than a casual obser-

vation may lead us to suppose. Indeed, I feel that we cannot review the lists of these Colleges, even if we were to confine ourselves to those who have honored us by becoming the Presidents of this Society—we cannot, I repeat, review these lists, without feeling that they contain the names of many persons, who possess so many high attainments, and so many admirable qualities, that *we*, (I mean the general practitioners) would hardly wish, even if we had the power, to bring them down to a level with ourselves: and I am persuaded that we should all shrink from the thought of giving them the slightest reason to suppose themselves undervalued by us. But though none will more readily grant this than myself, I think it cannot be denied, that the Colleges and the Hall also, contain many gross abuses, and require many alterations before they will be adapted to the spirit of the times, and the advancing state of the profession at large. The best means of obtaining so desirable an end, there are many here who are much more competent than I am to decide. I would only venture to suggest that professional honors should be conferred, after the first examination, *by the body of the profession itself*. But however this may be, it is, I repeat, the duty of every man not to treat this matter with indifference, and not to slumber at his post, but to exert himself, if not for his own benefit, at least for that of his children, or of those who may succeed him in his present arduous duties. It



is, indeed, a thing to be greatly desired, that we should exert our united efforts to obtain the objects which we have in view, with as little injury as possible to the interests and feelings of others. We should be much upon our guard that we are not guided by unworthy motives, and that we aim not at selfish ends ; and in every change that we propose we should seek not our *own* welfare alone, but that of *all* our professional brethren. It seems to me that we should be undeserving of our station, as the members of an enlightened profession, if we should be capable of offering a factious opposition to the government under which we live, or of an unworthy desire to profit by the loss of others. No ! let us put far from us such mean and sordid feelings, and rather let us patiently bear with our present situation, than incur the charge of rashness or unkindness from those whom we have so much reason to respect. Thus shall we acquit ourselves to our own consciences and in *their* sight also, until at last the happy time may arrive when the evils of which we complain may be justly redressed.

THE END.